

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
ATLANTA DIVISION**

Aldrich Sharpe,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	Civil Action File No.:
)	
v.)	
)	
Diversified Adjustment Service, Inc.,)	<u>COMPLAINT WITH JURY TRIAL DEMAND</u>
)	
Defendant.)	

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

This action for damages is based upon the Defendant's overt and intentional, unlawful conduct in the furtherance of its efforts to collect a consumer debt. The Defendant's conduct is in violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA), 15 U.S.C. 1692 *et seq.* and the Georgia Fair Business Practices Act, (GFBPA) O.C.G.A. 10-1-390 *et seq.*

PARTIES

1. Plaintiff, Aldrich Sharpe, is a natural person who resides in Clayton County, Georgia.

2. Defendant, Diversified Adjustment Service, Inc., is a corporation formed under the laws of the State of Minnesota. It does business in and is registered in Georgia. Defendant may be served with process via its registered agent, C T Corporation System, 289 S Culver Street, Lawrenceville, GA 30046.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. This Court has federal question jurisdiction over Plaintiff's FDCPA claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(d). This Court has supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state law claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1337.

4. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendant because, *inter alia*, Defendants frequently and routinely conducts business in the State of Georgia, including the conduct complained of herein.

5. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391, venue is proper in the Northern District of Georgia because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in this district.

6. Pursuant to LR 3.1B(3), venue is proper in the Atlanta Division because the Defendant maintains a registered agent in Gwinnett County which is in the Atlanta Division.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

7. Plaintiff is allegedly obligated to pay a consumer debt arising out of a cellular telephone bill and is therefore, a “consumer”, as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3).

8. Defendant is a collection agency specializing in the collection of consumer debt.

9. Defendant uses interstate commerce and/or mail in its business in the collection of consumer debts.

10. Defendant manages, and collects upon, thousands of consumer debt accounts annually.

11. Defendant is, therefore, a “debt collector” as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(6).

12. Defendant had attempted to collect an alleged debt by placing a negative account on Plaintiff’s credit report.

13. Defendant called Plaintiff in November of 2020 because Plaintiff did not recognize the debt on his credit report.

14. Defendant informed Plaintiff that the account was for an unpaid balance on a cellular telephone.

15. Plaintiff told Defendant that he did not recognize the account and did not believe he owed the amount claimed.

16. Plaintiff disputed the account to Defendant and stated that he was being charged for a telephone which he had returned.

17. Despite Plaintiff disputing the account to Defendant, Defendant placed the account on Plaintiff's Equifax and Experian credit reports the following month without noting that the account was disputed.

18. Per 15 U.S.C. § 1681s-2(a)(1)(A) of the FCRA, a furnisher of credit information "...shall not furnish any information relating to a consumer to any consumer reporting agency if the person knows or has reasonable cause to believe that the information is inaccurate."

19. Moreover, a data furnisher, such as the Defendant, has an affirmative duty to update the information provided to a credit reporting agency to maintain accuracy and completeness. 15 U.S.C. § 1681s-2(a)(2)(B).

20. Upon information and belief, Defendant's agreement(s) with Transunion and Experian require Defendant to report account information on a regular basis or schedule.

21. Defendant failed to mark Plaintiff's account as disputed when it updated Plaintiff's credit report.

22. Plaintiff suffered financial anxiety and worry about his credit report due to Defendant's failure to accurately represent his dispute on his credit report.

23. Defendant's actions caused inaccurate information about Plaintiff's credit history to be published to third parties.

INJURIES-IN-FACT

24. The FDCPA provides consumers with "statutorily-created rights to be free from 'being subjected to false, deceptive, unfair, or unconscionable means to collect a debt.'" *McCamis v. Servis One, Inc.*, No. 8:16-CV-1130-T-30AEP, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 99492 (M.D. Fla. July 29, 2016); *Church v. Accretive Health, Inc.*, 654 Fed. Appx. 990, 2016 U.S. App. LEXIS 12414, 2016 WL 3611543 (11th Cir. 2016).

25. An injury-in-fact sufficient to satisfy Article III standing requirements "may exist solely by virtue of statutes creating legal rights, the invasion of which creates standing." *Church*, at 993, quoting *Havens Realty Corp. v. Coleman*, 455 U.S. 363, 373, 102 S. Ct. 1114, 71 L. Ed. 2d 214 (1982).

26. Violation of statutory rights are not a "hypothetical or uncertain" injury, but one "that Congress has elevated to the status of a legally cognizable injury through the FDCPA." *McCamis*, at 4, citing *Church*, at 3.

27. Defendant is subjecting Plaintiff to false, deceptive, unfair, and unconscionable means to collect the debt.

28. Defendant's acts and omissions caused particularized harm to the Plaintiff in that he has suffered anxiety and worry about his credit report, had inaccurate credit information published to third parties, and took time to discuss his debt with counsel in response to the false statements.

29. Accordingly, through the suffering of actual damages and a violation of Plaintiffs' statutorily created rights under the FDCPA, Plaintiffs have suffered an injury-in-fact sufficient to establish Article III standing.

DAMAGES

30. As a result of the Defendant's actions and/or omissions, Plaintiff has suffered actual damages, including but not limited to the following:

- a.) Being subjected to false, deceptive, unfair, and unconscionable debt collection practices;
- b.) Uncompensated time expended away from work and/or activities of daily living, to confer with counsel regarding the Defendant's collection efforts; and,
- c.) Anxiety and worry caused by the Defendant causing inaccurate information about Plaintiff's credit histories to be published to third parties.

CAUSES OF ACTION

COUNT I

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT

15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.*

31. Plaintiff incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 30 as though fully stated herein.

Violations of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e and its subparts

32. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e specifically prohibits the use of any false, deceptive, or misleading representations or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

33. The use of “or” in § 1692e means a representation violates the FDCPA if it is false or deceptive or misleading. *Bourff v. Rubin Lublin, LLC*, 674 F.3d 1238, 1241 (11th Cir. 2012).

34. The standard in determining the nature of any such representation is that of the “least sophisticated consumer.” Its purpose is to protect “naive consumers” with a minimal understanding of personal finance and debt collection. *LeBlanc v. Unifund CCR Partners*, 601 F.3d 1185, 1194 (11th Cir. 2010) (per curiam).

35. Moreover, the least sophisticated consumer is not to be held to the same standard as a reasonably prudent consumer. The least sophisticated consumer,

though not unreasonable, is "ignorant" and "unthinking," "gullible," and of "below-average sophistication or intelligence," *Pinson v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, Nat'l Ass'n*, No. 16-17107, 2019 U.S. App. LEXIS 33662, at 12-13 (11th Cir. Nov. 12, 2019), quoting *Clomon v. Jackson*, 988 F.2d 1314, 1318 (2nd Cir. 1993).

36. A false representation in connection with the collection of a debt is sufficient to violate the FDCPA, even if it is not alleged or proven to be misleading or deceptive.

37. Communicating or threatening to communicate to any person credit information which is known or which should be known to be false, including the failure to communicate that a disputed debt is disputed, is a false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(8).

38. Defendant's failure to mark Plaintiff's account as disputed on his credit report were objectively false and/or materially misleading and a violation of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, e(8) and e(10) among others.

39. As a result of Defendant's violations of the FDCPA, Defendant is liable to Plaintiffs for actual damages as described herein, statutory damages in the amount of \$1,000.00, costs of this action and reasonable attorney's fees as determined by the Court as mandated by 15 U.S.C. § 1692k.

COUNT II

VIOLATIONS OF THE GEORGIA FAIR BUSINESS PRACTICES

ACT

O.C.G.A. § 10-1-390, *et seq.*

40. Plaintiff incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 39 as though fully stated herein.

41. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-390 *et seq.* is commonly known as the "Fair Business Practices Act of 1975" (the "GFBPA").

42. The purpose of the GFBPA, is to protect consumers from unfair and/or deceptive practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce in part or wholly in the state. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-391.

43. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-391 directs that the GFPBA is to be interpreted and applied liberally and in harmony with the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a)(1), which implements the FDCPA.

44. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a) of the GFBPA broadly prohibits unfair and/or deceptive business practices.

45. Defendant intentionally engaged in unfair and deceptive business practices, as set forth herein, in an effort to collect a consumer debt.

46. Defendant's conduct has implications for the consuming public in general.

47. Defendant's conduct negatively impacts the consumer marketplace.

48. Collecting a debt incurred during a consumer transaction could harm the general consuming public if conducted via deceptive acts or practices and clearly falls within the parameters of the GFBPA. Thus, a violation of the FDCPA constitutes a violation of the GFBPA. *See 1st Nationwide Collection Agency, Inc. v. Werner*, 288 Ga. App. 457, 459 (2007).

49. Upon information and belief, Defendant does not maintain a place of business in Georgia and has no assets in Georgia, thus relieving Plaintiffs of the Notice and Demand requirements of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(b).

50. As a result of Defendant's violations of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a), Plaintiff is entitled to recover general damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(a).

51. As a result of Defendant's intentional violations of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a), Plaintiff is entitled to recover exemplary damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(a).

52. As a result of Defendant's intentional violations of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a), Plaintiff is entitled to recover treble damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(c).

53. Plaintiff is entitled to recover reasonable attorney's fees and expenses of litigation pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(d).

TRIAL BY JURY

54. Plaintiff is entitled to and hereby requests a trial by jury.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that judgment be entered against Defendant for:

- a.) Plaintiff's actual damages;
- b.) Statutory damages pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k;
- c.) Reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k;
- d.) General and exemplary damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(a);
- e.) Treble damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(c); and
- f.) Such other and further relief as may be just and proper.

Respectfully submitted this 24th day of March, 2021.

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